



Testimony of Brooke Carta
Vice President of Local 466, Middletown
HB 5356, An Act Concerning Pandemic Pay for Essential Workers
Labor and Public Employees Committee

Good morning, Senator Kushner, Representative Porter, and members of the Labor and Public Employees Committee.

My name is Brooke Carta. I'm the secretary at Farm Hill School in Middletown. I also serve as vice president of Local 466 of AFSCME Council 4.

I'm here today to speak in favor of House Bill 5356 — An Act Concerning Pandemic Pay for Essential Workers. I am honored to speak on behalf of more than 360 city and school employees that my union represents.

Our workforce has stepped up in ways that we never thought necessary or possible, providing seamless delivery of services during the pandemic.

As a school secretary, I see and hear it all from my desk in the main office — the hub of our school. When the COVID-19 pandemic hit, there were so many unknowns about this brand new virus.

We didn't know if Covid could be contracted just by touching a piece of mail — yet our custodians were at school, handling mail and other deliveries, constantly sanitizing doorknobs and other surfaces.

We didn't know the long-term effects of contracting the illness — yet our cafeteria workers had to feed students and families in dire circumstances. They came together with our security guards and prepared and distributed thousands of meals every day, doing everything possible to ensure that no child went hungry.

Although we did know just how contagious the virus was, we didn't ask questions when a child needed a device or food and didn't have a way to pick it up. We got in the car and delivered it. Days, nights, weekends.

Our school nurses became the go-to people for panicked parents, students and staff.

The school district's tech staff had to immediately find ways to make working and learning remotely possible for thousands of students and staff. Everyone pitched in to solve tech problems coming from kids, staff, parents and grandparents.

Our Central Office and City Hall staff had to make sure our City/BOE operations could continue, making sure elections ran, documents were filed, orders were placed, bills were paid, payroll was processed.

The water and sewer department ensured the safe operation of the City water and sewer systems, while public works made sure that City streets were safe, maintained and snow removal happened in a timely manner. Sanitation made certain that trash was picked up as usual. All often working in very close quarters.

The demand for City parks was never higher.

Our workers in police, fire and dispatch had to respond in life or death situations despite the national emergency.

And although I do not represent them I'd like to acknowledge the teachers, paras, principals, and all other school staff for their amazing contributions and tireless efforts.

This one-time payment of \$2,000 to full-time employees and \$1,000 to part-time employees deemed essential would send a strong message of appreciation to thousands of employees statewide — many who were suddenly deemed essential, people who continually risked the health and safety of themselves and their families by showing up to work.

We never asked why, never complained, never questioned working out of our job description or extra hours. We came together to get the job done for our students and our community.

Please vote in favor of this bill to recognize what we saw and went through every day.

Thank you for the opportunity to speak today.